

**Pan-Asian Malaysians can sue Zam
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was so secretive about confirming the likelihood of a general election, that he may have revealed more than he realised - about himself.

With speculation over the date heating up in recent months, it was only natural that he was asked about this after chairing a Barisan Nasional supreme council meeting yesterday.

His response, as reported in The Star today: "You want to know, I never reveal what I want to do. Cannot, cannot tell you."

Malaysiakini tested this against Abdullah's long-standing claim that promoting transparency is a key plank of his administration.

Husam Musa, PAS vice-president

Pak Lah has always said he would strengthen transparency and democracy. So he needs to be transparent with the date (of the election). It's not a privilege for the PM (to keep this a secret) in a democracy. Even in developing countries, election dates are revealed four to six months ahead of an election.

But at the end of the day, he is a politician. He is not telling the truth 100 percent.

(He should not) leave us puzzled (over the election date). This is best practice. I insist that the government to reveals the date earlier, so that we can see if it coincides with a 'feel-good' atmosphere, rather than wait for the feel-good atmosphere, then call for an election.

P Ramasamy, DAP international secretary

There's nothing for him to reveal anyway. He's an empty person. He's also saying that people are feeling good ... I don't think we are feeling good. I don't think the economy is doing well. Of course, the date is known to Abdullah alone. What is so secret about the election date anyway?

I'm not sure what's he is trying to say when he makes these statements. This is childish talk. He thinks he's saying something profound but he's not. Let's not read too much into it.

Ramon Navaratnam, Transparency International Malaysia president

Quite frankly, he is not wrong. Any political leader in power around the world rarely or never reveals the date of elections unless this is constitutionally required. This is the tradition of democracies anywhere. We have to accept and recognise that we have to be prepared.

The onus is on the public to be diligent, vigilant and watchful in monitoring the performance of their MPs and state assemblypersons. It is for them to decide whether these individuals

should be returned to power or not, regardless of the date of elections. It is for them to vote wisely.

I recognise the right of the government to observe the ultimate deadline (for elections) and to give 14 days' notice for campaigning. We should all be ready to vote on the basis of their track record and throw out those people who didn't deliver their promises.

Lim Guan Eng, DAP secretary-general

He may be saying the election will not be held so soon, but his body language and the body politic says something else. (What he said) is symptomatic of Pak Lah. He won't tell you anything. He won't tell you what the government is doing, how he is dealing with the corruption issue, toll agreements - he just won't tell you.

It's his prerogative not to do so. We won't get distracted by this and we will be prepared when the time comes. Also, I don't think he has got any more good news to give the people.

Tian Chua, Parti Keadilan Rakyat information chief

The issue is clear. At the Barisan Nasional supreme council meeting yesterday, they were checking the readiness of the states for elections. What I heard is that Sabah, Terengganu, Penang and Kelantan are not ready yet. Pak Lah definitely has an election in mind. What he said is quite revealing in that the election is coming up.

He used to say he would do such-and-such and that he has to carry out his mandate. Now he is saying he has much to do and that he will tell us when the election date is coming. His tone has changed.

Sure he said he's the only one who will tell us (the election date) but we cannot take his words seriously. Besides, all the other BN component parties said they are ready for elections and are fighting for seats. That's already a sign.

Ahirudin Attan, blogger and voter

It is yet another phrase by the PM which will make people wonder where he's coming from. A lot of us have stopped taking him seriously. We want to understand what he's thinking but sometimes he doesn't make sense.

I don't know what to make of this. The PM should make it a point to express himself more clearly especially on matters of public interest. I'm not surprised he has come up with such remarks. I was flabbergasted with his comment on the RM200 million jet (purchased by Khazanah) and I was stupefied with his "It's rumours" response. He could give us a straightforward answer. I'm sure the rakyat would be happy to hear such good news.

It's the same with talk on elections. The PM could be more clear about the subject matter. The voters would like an indication at least.

Sivarasa Rasiah, Coalition for Clean & Fair Election (Bersih) spokesperson

His comment is a reflection of the regrettable reality of our election system. The PM has the sole power to announce the election date and dissolve Parliament which makes (the system) unfair. In genuine democracies, there is a fixed date in the election system. Everybody knows ahead of time and everybody prepares on equal footing.

(Ours) is an unfair system and reform would require legislative changes. This is what Bersih has raised from the start.

Wong Chin Huat, political analyst and elections expert

We recognise that it's the prerogative of the PM to dissolve Parliament and to announce the elections date. In some countries, the government would not try to catch their opponents off-guard by calling for snap elections. Those are cheapskate tactics to win elections.

What we have now is a situation where many people are speculating as to when the election will be held. Instead, there should be a law that allows the PM to announce the date in advance for public knowledge. Elections shouldn't be a surprise. The PM need not do this unless the government is really desperate.

Based on the previous general election results, the PM should be confident about getting a mandate again. The PM can not only win the election, but win it in a respectable way.

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